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CAPITOL SPOTLIGHT
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SAUDI ALLIANCE WORTH LITTLE

During the spirited debate over the sale of AWACS aircraft to Saudi Arabia, the Administration and other friends of the Saudis relied very heavily on the argument that the AWACS deal was necessary to maintain America's strong alliance with Saudi Arabia.

During the Senate debate, one senator after another rose to praise the Saudis as "moderate", "Western-oriented", "friendly to America", etc. Of course, the main virtues the Saudis were alleged to have were both the willingness and ability to restrain radical elements in the Arab world.

Over the last few months it has become clearer than ever before that all the talk about the value of the Saudis is pure nonsense. We needed the Saudis to support the Camp David agreement. They refused to do so. We needed the Saudis to help end the ostracism of Egypt among Arab nations. They did the opposite--they added their voices to the most radical Arabs by condemning Egypt for making peace with Israel.

Saudi Arabia's friends in the State Department were counting on the Saudis to influence King Hussein of Jordan to moderate his attitude towards the Camp David process. Naturally, this hope was in vain as the Saudis have neither moderated their own stance nor influenced others towards more accomodating views.

Right now, America would be overjoyed if the Saudi Arabians used their influence on Syria and the P.L.O. to bring about the withdrawal of all foreign forces in Lebanon. The Saudis have made it clear that they lack the courage to confront the extremists in the Arab world, even on the level of rhetoric.

I believe now, just as I did at the time of the AWACS sale, that Saudi Arabia is an implacable enemy of Israel. I also believe that the Saudis are infinitely indifferent to the consequences that their policies have for the United States. Saudi Arabia is a super-cautious, super-self-centered country interested primarily in the maintenance of power by the Royal Family. Their other top priority goal is maximum economic exploitation of the Kingdom's oil wealth.

How can the Saudis be reliable allies of the United States when they live in utter fear of even the most minuscule threat to their rule? For years the Saudis have financed the PLO to make sure that

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Arafat's terrorism was directed far from their borders. They dread every tiny fundamentalist Islamic sect or group--constantly fearing the fate the Shah of Iran met at the hands of religious zealots.

I wonder what it will take to convince the Arabists in the State Department that all their calculations about the Middle East rest on erroneous assumptions? Israel is the only ally the United States has in the Middle East. No other country of strategic importance has a record of close military and diplomatic cooperation with the United States. It is the alliance with Israel, and not with the Jordanians or Saudis, that has kept the Soviet Union from playing a significant role in the Middle East.

This is a good time for President Reagan, Secretary Weinberg, and Secretary Schultz to evaluate America's Middle East policy. The Saudis won the AWACS planes they wanted so badly. What tangible or intangible benefit has the United States received in exchange? In international relations, as in personal affairs, "friendship" means being able to count on your friends when you need them.

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